

Code of Ethics

Preamble

Harris County Public Health (HCPH) is a multifaceted ethical organization with a legal duty and obligation to serve the public health needs of the people, organizations, animals, and environment of Harris County;

HCPH recognizes that it represents community level interests and that those interests can come into conflict with the interests of sub-communities and individuals as well as with the limitations of scarce public resources;

As a result, HCPH and the Divisions, Offices, and individuals who conduct work on its behalf, including staff, contractors, interns, and volunteers, confront decisions in their interactions with constituents in which the best or right course of action is not immediately evident;

HCPH desires that such decisions are made with fair and just principles and is confident that the use of such principles in difficult decisions will enhance mutual respect and trust between HCPH and its constituents as well as increase satisfaction for the outcome of the decision;

Therefore, HCPH implements this aspirational Code of Ethics as a general guide for ethical decision making and for ensuring that, in difficult ethical decisions, the public health obligations of HCPH are balanced in a just way with the individual rights of its constituents, and that the mutual goal of a flourishing community is brought closer.

Ethical Principles

1. We will conduct our public duties openly, free to explain our work and why we do it, as permitted by law.
2. We will act in a timely manner on the information we have in order to protect and promote public health; conversely, we will provide the public with the information we have in a timely manner, within what is allowed by law, in order for them to protect and promote their own health.
3. We will respect the confidentiality of all constituents, as permitted by law.
4. We will act in a manner that aims to distribute the benefits and burdens of our work fairly and creates the least harm, particularly in circumstances in which decisions are made with scarce resources or by mandates of other entities that can result in harm to members of the public.

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5. We will work to ensure that basic resources and the conditions necessary to attain good health are accessible by all, and particularly by those historically experiencing inequities; and that our programs and policies are implemented in a way that enhances socioeconomic and environmental conditions in Harris County and does not contribute to inequities.
6. We will work to achieve public health in a way that respects the rights of individuals and sub-communities in the larger jurisdiction, by incorporating approaches that anticipate and respect diverse values, beliefs, and cultures, and by seeking the input of stakeholders whenever possible including through trusted community partners.
7. As stewards of public time and resources, we will exercise public duties free from undue political, partisan, private, or special influence or the appearance of influence. We will not grant special consideration, treatment, or advantage to individual constituents beyond that which is available to every other person of Harris County.
8. We will conduct ourselves in accordance with this Code of Ethics and with other professional norms. We will show respect to constituents and colleagues at all times. We will seek opportunities for continuing education and consultation on issues that may have ethical considerations and will encourage the same professional development in others.
9. Those who have authority to order subordinates to undertake tasks shall be prepared to take responsibility for the outcomes of the task as though they had undertaken the act themselves. Furthermore, compliance with professional licensing shall preempt the expectations or instructions of persons in authority or the organization.
10. Disclosure of actions that are reasonably believed to be substantial and specific violations of ethical principles are recognized as and shall be protected in principle and by the Harris County Whistleblower Protections Program, and such other state and federal whistle-blower laws and conditions as apply.

The following sources were used in the development of this code:

1. [Code of Ethics for Harris County Commissioners Court](#) (2009)
2. [Principles of the Ethical Practice of Public Health](#) (2002)

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